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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran - Ahmadinejad's

Revisionism Iraq - Elections

PARIS - Thursday, December 15, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran - Ahmadinejad's Revisionism

Iraq - Elections

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Dealing with the national debt is one of today's major front-page stories. Inside, the EU summit and the battle between Blair and Chirac get wide coverage. International stories focus on Iran's President Ahmadinejad and his latest remarks denying the existence of the Holocaust. Several national and regional editorials comment on Iran's "madman" (regional La Republique des Pyrenees.) (See Part C)

The elections in Iraq are a major story: Le Monde illustrates two sides of Iraq's reality with an editorial entitled "Ballots and Bombs." In Le Figaro correspondent Philippe Gelie reports on "Washington's concerns" about the possibility of continued "political instability" in Iraq. "Washington is getting ready for months of post-electoral negotiations." In Liberation Pascal Riche notes President Bush's "strategy for victory in Iraq." (See Part C)

Le Figaro's correspondent Philippe Gelie pens an analysis of the U.S. and the death penalty, in connection with the execution of 'Tookie' Williams: "If the U.S. abolishes the death penalty one day, the decision will come from the Supreme Court rather than Congress. But that day is far into the future; the recent nominations made by President Bush do not point that way. The power held by Supreme Court Justices explains why each nomination triggers such heated political battles."

Alexandre Adler pens an op-ed in Le Figaro on the Middle East and "its Omega point." "Four independent phenomena are getting ready to converge: Lebanon's independence, the programmed end of the Syrian regime, the growing confrontation between Iraq's Shiites and Sunnis, or an Iraqi historic compromise, and the positioning of Iran's President."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran - Ahmadinejad's Revisionism

"Quarantine"

Patrick Sabatier in left-of-center Liberation (12/15): "When a head of state dreaming of the A bomb puts himself outside the law and negates History, it is no longer possible to continue having a dialogue with that nation. What are the Europeans, and France in particular, waiting for to freeze their diplomatic relations with Iran? Ahmadinejad's outbursts represent the public version of a virus which is widespread throughout Muslim nations. The virus is propagated by the media, the regimes, religious and intellectual figures who find this a comfortable way to hide the harsh reality of poverty from their publics. This anti-Semitic virus was inoculated by the Europeans themselves. It is not an excuse not to quarantine those who have been infected. Trying to pacify an enemy for the sake of peace leads often, as Churchill said, to dishonor, and war."

"Regression in Iran"

Jean-Christophe Ploquin in Catholic La Croix (12/15):

"Ahmadinejad is obviously not very sure of his following: for the second time in a week he has chosen a theme which promises the automatic alliance of his people. These horrendous diatribes prove his concern to close the ranks behind him. His strategy aims also to cut all ties with Europe before next Wednesday's new attempts to negotiate the nuclear issues. The EU-3 members immediately condemned the remarks and a deep pessimism prevails before next week's meeting. Europe's diplomats watch, powerless, the regression of a regime that for a time seemed on the way to reform. Dialogue is becoming increasingly difficult with Iran. This dramatic evolution can have a very negative impact on the Muslim world where denying the existence of the Shoah is very popular. Despite this

cultural chasm, the Europeans must find a way to negotiate and sound convincing, while never conceding an inch about the Holocaust."

"Iran's Revisionism Returns"

Dephine Minoui in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/15):

"Ahmadinejad's latest remarks have elicited reactions of indignation from around the world, starting with the White House, which has characterized the remarks as 'scandalous.' Yet for the Iranians, their President's words are but the repetition of a perpetual revolutionary refrain which has dominated Iran's political stage since 1979. But since Ahmadinejad's election, such statements have become more systematic and contrast with the more open policy adopted by Khataami. According to a western diplomat, the problem with Ahmadinejad is that he is 'doing everything imaginable to fit his own caricature as drawn by Washington's neo-conservatives. In so doing, he feeds their rhetoric and does a disservice to his country.'"

"A Madman Made King"

Jean-Marcel Bouguereau in regional La Republique des Pyrenees (12/15): "The Iranians are beginning to realize they elected a madman as their president. Not only is Ahmadinejad beginning to seriously worry the world at large, he is also beginning to worry those who made him king. So much so that a battle is raging among Iran's conservatives themselves. The Iranian President's declarations are symptomatic of a political team which has been unable to implement none of the reforms promised during the campaign."

Iraq - Elections

"Washington Fears Prolonged Political Instability"

Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/14):

"Washington's preference goes to Allawi, a tough politician and a secular Shiite who allowed the 'clean-up' of Najaf by the U.S. Army last year and who extended a hand to the Sunnis. With Allawi, the risk of the Iraqis asking for an anticipated withdrawal of American troops would disappear. According to diplomatic sources, Arab ambassadors in Washington were invited to openly support the candidate, but the Department of State has denied this and the allegations that U.S. funds have financed Allawi's campaign."

"Ballots and Bombs"

Left-of-center Le Monde in its editorial (12/15): "The good news is that the Iraqis will be voting on December 15 for the third time this year. In a country such as Iraq, this is an undeniable success. Unfortunately the long lines waiting to cast their ballots tell only part of the story. The other reality, the one dominating the news since May 2003, when President Bush thought he could proclaim the war was over, are the bombs, the suicide attacks, and the guerrilla attacks directed at the 'occupying' Americans, their allies and the civilian or military Iraqi representatives. President Bush has just acknowledged that this other war has caused 30 000 deaths, including 2 000 American soldiers. For the U.S., a semblance of democracy, short of a real one, is needed so that the Iraqi adventure does not end in shameful defeat. To bring the troops back, the U.S. needs the Iraqi security forces to take over, at least partially. But this is not possible yet. Short of a purely military solution, the Americans are counting on the virtuous effects of the ballots. But far from triggering calm, the situation continues to worsen. It would be naive to believe that these elections will be enough to change the situation, and it will not resolve the dilemma of the Bush administration: to stay and re-enforce the fight against a foreign presence; to leave and see Iraq sink into a civil war. To come out from under, the U.S. President might be tempted to choose a middle road where all the disadvantages would be coming together."

"Regression in Iraq"

Didier Eugene in regional Ouest France (12/15): "The worst has happened in Iraq: a new sanctuary for terrorists, poverty and civil war. International law has regressed, torture has become routine, state lies are becoming a habit. Saddam is winning against the virtues which President Bush claimed to be bringing to Iraq. The government and the parliament that will come out of these elections will be facing a double challenge: finding a common basis for a viable state and ensure the nation's security so that the Iraqis' wish for the U.S. Army's departure might become reality. But a unilateral withdrawal of American troops will not happen soon, despite the midterm elections. The end of President Bush's second term may not suffice to resume appeased international relations. Meanwhile, seven years will have passed since a certain September 11."

STAPLETON